

6. Notes on the Mode of Feeding of the Egg-eating Snake.  
(*Dasyveltis scabra*). By Miss M. EDITH DURHAM<sup>1</sup>.

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(Plate XXXII.)

The following observations were made on a specimen of this Snake from South Africa, presented to the Society's Gardens by Mr. J. Matcham, C.M.Z.S., of Port Elizabeth, and measuring 18·8 inches in length.

The snake, on perceiving the egg, glided round it and examined it frequently with its tongue (fig. 1); it then raised its head and made a rather feeble, ineffectual snap at the egg. Finally, however, it opened its mouth very widely, and suddenly seizing the egg by the smaller end, the jaws and the skin under them expanding enormously, swallowed it quickly and with a strong effort (fig. 2).

The egg being now in the œsophagus, the snake remained still with its head raised, its spine strongly arched, and the whole throat greatly distended (fig. 3).

It then, slowly and with evident effort, lowered its head till it rested on the ground (figs. 4 and 5), straightening its spine by degrees and thus driving the spinal "teeth" into the egg and crushing it. The egg gradually flattened, and the snake resumed its natural proportions in about 15 minutes from first seizing the egg. It lay still for a quarter of an hour, exerting its tongue occasionally, the body and tail still maintaining the position shown in fig. 3.

It then suddenly and violently began to press the portion of its throat containing the egg against the ground (fig. 6), at the same time arching its body behind it and raising its head. These efforts appeared violent and convulsive, and were repeated several times in succession, the snake meanwhile crawling about restlessly. Then, pausing, it raised its head, swayed it slightly to and fro, gave a violent lateral wriggle, opened its mouth widely, and with a effort ejected the crushed egg-shell (see fig. 7), 1 hour and  $\frac{3}{4}$  after first seizing the egg.

The process of swallowing and disgorging has been the same every time I have witnessed it, but has sometimes been quicker.

I have never seen the subject of these observations take anything larger than a hedge-sparrow's or a canary's egg, but very large specimens can even swallow hen's eggs—witness the specimen preserved in the British Museum with the uncrushed egg still in the œsophagus. The power of distention of the jaws and throat is very great, the circumference of the egg being nearly three times that of the neck of the snake in its usual condition.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXXII.

Figs. 1-5. The various stages of *Dasyveltis scabra* in the act of swallowing an egg, as described above.

Figs. 6 & 7. The rejection of the shell.

<sup>1</sup> Communicated by Dr. JOHN ANDERSON, F.R.S., Vice-President. On this subject see Mr. Tegetmeier's article in 'Field,' vol. lxxx. p. 204, July 30th, 1892.—P. L. S.